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The Geostrategic Context

“Sub-Saharan Africa:
A Focused Strategy for U.S. Policy”

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Introduction

The African continent is roughly three times the size of the United States with almost 700 million people. Its 48 independent states with 500 ethnic groups speaking 2,000 languages and dialects present a challenge to the United States that appears almost insurmountable. Huge problems in Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, can lead to huge threats to the national security of the United States. However, those problems can also mean huge opportunities.

It is in the United States' interest to take advantage of those opportunities. Access to resources such as gold, diamonds and uranium make Sub-Saharan Africa important to the United States. Roughly 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa are important for American markets. The opportunity to have access to bases to project American power from African soil is also important as was illustrated during the Gulf War. Human suffering that results from natural disasters or genocidal civil war becomes important to Americans as events unfold. In short, the United States has significant interests in Sub-Saharan Africa and will for the foreseeable future.

The problem is, what to do about it? Extremes range from putting a fence around the continent and ignoring it to applying all available resources to solve Sub-Saharan Africa's problems. Of course both are unacceptable, so the United States has taken a middle-of-the-road approach thus far. However, that approach is an abrogation of responsibility. The United States appears to articulate an unbalanced strategy between means and ends.

The United States needs a focused strategy, one that selects key states in three sub-Saharan Africa regions. Kenya, in the east, Ghana, in the west, and South Africa provide good starting points. These states can act as "magnets" for those surrounding them such that surrounding states build upon the successes of the key states. The selection of focus states needs to be based upon those with the most hope for improvement. The opportunities available must justify the risks involved. The key states must present the

most possible and feasible successes. As the key states succeed, the surrounding states need to build incrementally. As they do, the United States can refocus its strategy and limited resources to help ensure success.

U.S. Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Clinton Administration's 1995 National Security Strategy states that the United States "is committed to maintaining a leading role in Africa despite the lack of vital interests."¹ While we might agree that Africa has no *vital* interest to the US, *important, major* US interests in Africa are many and varied. First and foremost, we are interested in stability throughout the African continent. Without stability, economic growth cannot occur, and the human costs of chaos and anarchy will reach levels of savagery, death, starvation, suffering, and despair such as few in the West can imagine or tolerate. Chaos in Africa will demand America's attention as the world leader. In a future dominated by America, we will have no choice but to respond, at great cost to ourselves, to the horrors of instability.

There are tangible major interests as well. Africa's natural resources are staggering in size, diversity, and richness. It is home to 40% of the world's potential hydroelectric supply, 30% of the uranium, 50% of the gold, 90% of the cobalt, 50% of the phosphates, 40% of the platinum, 8% of the petroleum, 64% of the manganese, 70% of the cocoa, 60% of the coffee, and 13% of the copper, bauxite, nickel, and lead.² In addition, there are millions of acres of untilled farmland, most of excellent quality. Indeed, these resources have been Africa's curse as well as its blessing, in the form of European colonialism and its extractive policies.

Africa is not just a potential resource provider. Its 600 million people are a lucrative market for US goods and services. Communications, roads, electrical power, and construction are just some of the potential activities of US commercial interests in this

vast region Without stability however, this potential market for U S investment and trade will remain untapped

While some have said that there are no U S military interests in the region, East Africa served as a base of operations during Desert Shield and could be useful in furthering U S interests in the Middle East This is especially relevant in the context of a reduced American footprint in Muslim countries and increasing reluctance by those countries to support U S military infrastructure The use of Mombassa as a port by the Navy and Nairobi Airport as an airhead by the USAF are obvious examples in recent years The inevitable collapse of many African regimes will require military action to protect American citizens, and access to bases in Africa will greatly mitigate these operations

Transnational interests such as drug trafficking, crime, weapons of mass destruction, environmentalism, terrorism, population expansion and migration are all of serious concern in the African context Africa's population is growing faster than any region in the world This growth, the strain it will place on nation's abilities to feed themselves and provide social services, and the resulting potential migration of populations will generate instability inimical to U S interests Disease, pollution, drugs, and crime do not respect borders As our globe shrinks, these problems abroad will eventually, but sooner than we might think, come to our shores

The United States has stated that one of its interests is the promotion of "Democracy" in the world and the protection of "human rights" We agree that this is an important interest in Africa, but we should not be overly concerned with what nations *say* about Democracy, rather, we should be very concerned with what they *do* about it ⁵ That a country in Africa declares itself a Democracy and holds free and fair elections is a step in the right direction, but the best scenario for American interests is the creation of a political and economic climate that supports trade and investment. The rule of law, a responsible judiciary, freedom of religion, expression, and ideas, and a governmental

system which allows the sharing of power, rather than the consolidation of it on one man or one party- these are the elements of a liberal society in which stability, growth, transparency, and a favorable climate for trade and investment will follow. The cumulative effect of this sort of government is a better life for African people. These are all in the interests of the United States, and while it is the ultimate responsibility of African intellectuals to mold their societies in these directions, it is also the interest and *responsibility* of America as the world leader to do all in our power to assist them where and when we think we can do the most good.

Opportunities

In order to do the most good, the U S should focus its efforts on Kenya, Ghana and South Africa. All three countries present opportunities and risks. Some may argue that there are other countries on which to focus. The idea is to focus effort by weighing opportunities and risks.

Opportunities in Kenya are numerous. Their exports such as tea, coffee and refined petroleum (just to name a few) help provide an economic base to build upon. The 28 million people of Kenya are a market for American business. Currently, Kenya does almost 1/3 of its trade with the European Union. Access to that market alone can be prosperous for the U S. Reasonable economic success thus far has created a middle class that provides a tax base for continued economic success.⁴

The government structure is based on a two party system with civic elections. President Moi provides strong leadership. That leadership is arguably too strong, as will be addressed later, but the institution seems sound. The point is, there is opportunity in a society with a relatively strong government structure to build upon.

Kenya is also a good strategic location as indicated earlier. Access to naval and air ports is important to America and will continue to be. Kenya's historic ties to the U S and

its current economic and government foundations provide the U S with an East African nation with promise

The West African nation we should focus on is Ghana Exports from Ghana include gold, cocoa, timber and diamonds Cocoa is the second biggest export from an economy that derives 46% of its gross national product from agriculture The rich, fertile land in Ghana is important to the western region for food Access to precious metals and specialties like cocoa are important to American markets Access to Ghana's 20 million people represents another potential market for American businesses ⁵

Ghana has a multi-party parliamentary government that established constitutional rule in 1992 Its presidency is currently filled by military strongman Jerry Rawlings, but the institution appears to be solid As in Kenya, the institutional foundation exists to build upon with some focused U S guidance

Ghana also has a positive political figure that provides an example for Africa today United States Secretary-General Kofi Annan is a Ghana native and has been working at the international level for over 30 years ⁶ Such a positive figure can greatly influence regional politics in West Africa

The southern focus comes from South Africa South Africa provides the most promise of any nation in sub-Saharan Africa Its exports of gold, diamonds, uranium and a host of chemicals provide huge opportunities for the U S The 42 million people in the country are well educated and provide the largest middle class in all of sub-Saharan Africa ⁷ Their tax base supports a well developed, modern infrastructure and communications capability that provides a very strong and stable environment for business

Perhaps the single biggest opportunity is Nelson Mandela His role as president will be critical in South Africa's multi-party system and the implementation of their 1996 constitution The U S cannot afford to miss this opportunity and therefore must focus its approach on the key nation

Risks

The risks to American policy in Africa are many. In our three focus countries, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, the main risk to American interests is instability. The causes of this instability vary by state. In Kenya and Ghana, corrupt government is a major obstacle to development. Corruption control is a *sine qua non* for building democracy and political order in Africa. One of its many terrible effects is to give the military strong incentive to take absolute power, as is the case in Jerry Rawlings' Ghana.⁸ In Moi's Kenya, corruption is integral to the method of political domination. Its use to maintain power in one man or one party makes real reform and development impossible in the long term.⁹ Less apparent in South Africa, corruption remains a large and sobering challenge to African progress throughout the continent.

Ethnic tension is pandemic in Africa, and is especially problematic in Kenya and South Africa. In both countries, the ethnic tension is split across racial lines. In Kenya, it is between English speaking whites and African blacks. In South Africa, the tension is more diverse, with English-speaking whites, Coloreds, Afrikaners, and South Asians in the mix. In both countries the problems are not just racial, but tribal. In Kenya the Kikuyu and Somalis are continually in conflict, exacerbating refugee movements. In South Africa, the Zulus compete with other tribal affiliations. While corruption is certainly a *cause* for instability and dysfunction, we feel that ethnic tension is more of a *symptom* than a cause of instability. Ethnic tensions become politicized when power is not shared in a free and open society. Often the mere perception that basic needs are not being fulfilled is enough to allow easily discernible ethnic differences to lend political power to violent behavior. Couple this with African security forces whose function is to protect the ruling regime and you have a recipe for mass slaughter, destruction, and refugee creation - not to mention famine, plague, and societal and state collapse.

All three of our focus nations are plagued by lackluster economic performance ¹⁰ The causes of these are varied and complicated (and beyond the scope of this paper), but the end result in each case of economic stagnation is again, instability. Poor economic growth discourages foreign investment, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as lack of capital availability strangles better performance. Poor performance puts increasing pressure on resource allocation to meet basic human needs, such as food and salaries. As each nation becomes poorer it is less able to provide basic governmental services. The result is despair, disgust, exacerbation of ethnic tensions, and an increasingly inhospitable environment for economic growth. This death spiral results in more and more instability, leading to a worsening quality of life for Africans and a missed opportunity for the United States. In the worst nightmare scenario, this downward trend in the case of South Africa might result in a return to Apartheid and racial civil war, with all its attendant miseries and difficult choices for America.

Current U. S. Policies

Current U.S. policies are unfocused. As stated earlier, means and the ends are unbalanced. Our stated policies and our practice do not agree, and create confusion in America and Africa. To say "U.S. interests in sub-Saharan Africa are modest" is misleading ¹¹ While these interests may not be vital, they are most certainly important.

The U.S. focus currently looks at Africa as a homogeneous entity. It is impossible to formulate a single U.S. policy to cover 48 independent states representing 600 million people. The stages of the economies in each country vary tremendously. Even in the three key countries we have chosen, the economies are vastly different.

Governments throughout the region are also vastly different. The moderately well developed democratic institutions in South Africa are a far cry from the lack of any recognizable government (free or authoritarian) in Somalia. A single approach that blankets this broad range of governments is ineffective.

What little approach the U S has taken in sub-Saharan Africa fails to recognize opportunities According to the 1997 Strategic Assessment, "there exists no vital U S military interest in the sub-Saharan region that might lead to a major deployment of U S forces"¹² This statement misses the point While the U S might not want U S forces permanently stationed in Africa, the U S should not pass on the opportunity for access to bases in the region for whatever reason The U S must nurture the idea of access today to have the opportunity tomorrow

U S trade in sub-Saharan Africa is marginal today Exports to the region are less than 1% and imports are around 2%¹³ Today our economy handles that fact What about access to a market of over 600 million peoples tomorrow? If the U S does not choose to move on that market, someone else will and we will have missed yet another opportunity

Humanitarian values are exploited daily in sub-Saharan Africa The U S does not need to interfere every time it happens because such activity does not affect vital national interests However, to wait for dire situations to occur before acting misses an opportunity to affect the outcomes Again, if we do not engage today, we miss the opportunity for tomorrow

The token U S aid to sub-Saharan Africa is just a fraction of the aid given to Israel and Egypt The little military to military contact that helps build strong relationships between countries is less in sub-Saharan Africa than any other area in the world¹⁴ The 1 and 2 percentage points of economic trade with sub-Saharan Africa are virtually insignificant All of this adds up to the huge risk of too little, too late, in too many places, but characterizes current U S policy

Policy Recommendations

Africa is important to American interests However, a viable strategy for National Security must set priorities, and Africa, even just Sub-Saharan Africa, is too large, too varied, and too much beset by calamity to enjoy US assistance everywhere It is

imperative for us to select key nations in key regions where opportunities exist for improvement, where there remains hope for the future. We need to leverage our limited resources to gain the maximum benefit from those resources. Accordingly, US policy should focus on three key states: Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, in three key regions: West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa, respectively. As we have outlined, in each of these states there are risks. However, in each of these states there is a glimmer of hope. We have selected them based on our readings and limited area knowledge. Others may argue for alternative states like Nigeria or Botswana to be included, although Nigeria may be far too corrupt to save and Botswana too much of a success to need us. Our intent is to argue for a focused strategy, which takes maximum advantage of existing opportunities and leverages our resources for the most benefit.

This strategy does not imply that other states need be totally ignored. Many African states, with or without US support, will fail. Our military and diplomatic forces must remain prepared to function across the African continent in crisis management and resolution modes. We see no alternative to future crisis management in Africa, but our strategy seeks to focus US resources for the long term in the key states indicated.

Our strategy hopes that the "neighborhood effect"¹⁵ will allow small successes in key states to serve as beacons of hope and examples for neighboring states. Once we have helped achieve stability, rule of law, human individual rights, a conducive business climate, confidence for foreign investment, and economic growth in one state, we can shift our focus to neighboring states to join the march toward prosperity. This vision seeks a better life for Africans, not just because it is the right thing for the last remaining superpower to do, but because it is also in our own best interests to do so. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, the United States is the "last, best hope for the world." For millions of Africans, this simple fact remains a fundamental truth. A focused strategy is our tool to realize that hope.

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